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Chairman: Ms. Groux (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Switzerland)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/59/38, Parts I and II, A/59/135, A/59/185, A/59/185/Corr.1, A/59/281, A/59/313 and A/59/357)

Agenda item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*) (A/59/115, A/59/214 and A/59/281)

1. **Ms. Secaira** (Guatemala) said she associated herself with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Presidential Secretariat for Women, which had been created in Guatemala in 2000, was responsible for coordination and guidance with regard to policies, plans, programmes and actions for the advancement of women. Its first accomplishment had been the elaboration of the National Policy for the Promotion and Development of Guatemalan Women and the Plan for Equity of Opportunities 2001-2006. It was currently working on a strategy for promoting security for women, for which purpose it was conducting a study on the murder of women — regrettable offences that had been occurring in the country — with a view to devising prevention strategies. That endeavour formed part of the response to the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences.

2. To combat the rise in violence against women in Guatemala, a number of institutions had been set up, including the National Coordinating Agency to Prevent Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, which was made up of State agencies and representatives of civil society; the Agency for the Protection of Women, the Agency for the Protection of Indigenous Women, the Unit for the Protection of the Rights of Women of the Attorney General's Office, the women's section of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the programme for the prevention of domestic violence within the First Lady's Secretariat for Social Welfare.

3. In the field of health, Guatemala had also established a National Programme for Reproductive Health and a National Plan for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality, and continued to conduct the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS. Laws and legislative reforms to protect women were being prepared, particularly in the area of sexual harassment, traffic in women and discrimination, and to integrate women more fully into economic, social, political and cultural life. Ending discrimination and exclusion was the only means of achieving the integral development of society and the consolidation of the rule of law.

4. Closer international cooperation was necessary for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to meet the tremendous challenges involved in the prevention of hunger and poverty. Guatemala welcomed the initiative taken by the President of Brazil in that regard. It also applauded the work of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and offered its support in mainstreaming the gender perspective into all aspects of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

5. **Mr. Zoumanigui** (Guinea) associated himself with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The policy statement adopted by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had permitted the international community to reaffirm its commitment under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the need to mobilize national, regional and international political will to implement it. Guinea welcomed the progress made and hoped that the Committee would closely consider the recommendations included in the relevant reports as part of the preparations for the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference.

6. Within the West African subregion, Guinea had participated in the first meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in February 2004, and in the subregional meeting on the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action and other initiatives, held in April. He thanked the Division for the Advancement of Women for the seminar it had held in Dakar in May 2004 on strengthening national mechanisms by using information and communications technologies. Guinea had also participated in the seventh African Regional Conference on Women, held in Addis Ababa in October 2004, for which it had prepared a report on the implementation of the African and global platforms.

7. The tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference would provide on opportunity to take stock of

achievements and propose new initiatives. Guinea had undertaken to integrate the gender perspective into all its development programmes and believed that the advancement of women should be translated into concrete realities; it would therefore join all international efforts to bring about the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

8. **Mr. Al-Enezi** (Kuwait) said that Kuwait was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and had responded to requests for clarifications regarding the situation of women in Kuwait. In Kuwait, a number of institutional mechanisms had been established for the advancement of women, such as the women's literacy programme. In addition, Kuwait had recently signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and had ratified 15 conventions of the International Labour Organization, in particular the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

9. Women's participation in elections was of great importance. The Council of Ministers had recently approved a bill on the political rights of Kuwaiti women, which the National Assembly was certain to adopt in the current legislative period, thus expanding the participation of women in politics and development. In Kuwait, there was a high literacy and school enrolment rate for girls and women, who represented more than 50 per cent of primary and secondary school enrolment, and more than 37 per cent of enrolment at the university level. Women held more than 35 per cent of all jobs, participating in the preparation of general governmental policies in the areas of health, education, economy and culture, and had access to leadership positions. Moreover, institutions and mechanisms had been created to allow women to enjoy their freedoms, and laws had been enacted taking into consideration the specific situation of women, for instance, providing leave with full pay for taking care of family members with the option of returning to the same job. Kuwaiti women participated in regional and international conferences through governmental bodies and civil society organizations. Several Kuwaiti civil organizations, forming an essential part of the civil society, attended the Economic and Social Council in the capacity of observers.

10. In addition, a number of women's organizations were assisting in post-conflict situations in various regions of the world, such as Kosovo, and southern Lebanon following clashes with Israel, which exerted heavy pressure on women and children in the occupied Palestinian territories. Violence against women was a flagrant violation of their fundamental political rights and of international humanitarian law, hence women in situations involving armed conflict must be given preferential treatment.

11. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco) said that he associated himself with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Declaration and the documents adopted by the major United Nations summits and conferences demonstrated the will of the international community to eliminate the inequalities preventing women from fully enjoying their rights and participating in society. The situation of women had improved in some spheres, but many women still lived in conditions of extreme poverty and suffered from the effects of armed conflict, discrimination, violence and illiteracy. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted twenty-five years before, was of great importance; and the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference gave Morocco the occasion to renew the commitment it had made to attaining equality, development and peace for women.

12. The new Moroccan Family Code, which had entered into force in 2004, included important provisions: equal responsibilities within the family, elimination of the rule that wives should obey their husbands, the setting of the marriage age at 18, divorce by mutual consent and through conciliation and mediation mechanisms, strict standards for polygamy, acceptance of communal property for spouses and greater protection of children's rights. All administrative, human, financial and technical measures had been taken to ensure the implementation of the Code, such as the establishment of a family court, the training of court staff and the launching of awareness-raising campaigns throughout the country, in particular in rural areas. Other reforms had also been undertaken to bring legislation into line with international commitments, including the reform of the Labour Code, to include equality in employment and wages and protection of women against harassment,

and of the Criminal Code, to protect women against discrimination, domestic violence and sexual harassment. In addition, the new electoral code included provisions that had made possible the election of 35 women legislators in 2003.

13. Violence against women constituted a grave violation of their fundamental rights and hindered their full participation in society. In 2002, Morocco had adopted a national strategy to reduce violence against women, which involved new approaches to intervention and the establishment of databases for studying the problem. The Secretary-General's report on violence against women (A/59/281) contained detailed descriptions of the measures adopted by the Moroccan Government.

14. Both Government and civil society were conducting awareness-raising campaigns to promote and protect women's rights. One of the tasks of the Centre for Information, Documentation and Resources for Women, which had opened in October, would be to gather and disseminate information and documentation, and coordinate national and local activities. Lastly, he reaffirmed the support of Morocco for INSTRAW.

15. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Through its laws and national plans of action, Syria promoted women's advancement and gender equality. It also tried to protect women from economic and social problems and promote their participation in the development of communities.

16. In 1995, pursuant to its commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, Syria had established a national committee on women, which had formulated a national strategy on women. The empowerment of women in urban and rural areas had become one of the priority areas of national plans for economic and social development. Organizations of civil society, including various non-governmental organizations, had made a consistent and effective contribution to that effort.

17. Because of the influence of globalization on national policies, specific reforms had been introduced in an effort to soften its negative effects, increase women's participation in the economy and eliminate discrimination in access to information technology. Practical courses and national and regional conferences had been held on the promotion and empowerment of women. Of particular note in that regard were the forum on Arab women held in Damascus in 2003 and Syria's support for the initiatives of the Arab Women's Organization aimed at improving the situation of Syrian women.

18. With respect to the Secretary-General's report on follow-up to the Beijing Declaration, which focused on achieving the goal of gender equality, Syria believed that due attention had not been paid to certain important questions, and that women's advancement had been undermined as a result. As the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration approached, certain groups were still opposed to its full implementation. Syria trusted that the international community would adopt measures aimed at ensuring the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing+5 outcome document.

19. Women's empowerment and the promotion of their human rights were distant goals for women who lived under foreign occupation, which violated basic human rights, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Golan Heights, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon continued to be deprived of all their basic human rights, including protection, medical care, education, employment and others. They were victims of an odious form of discrimination, manifested by the occupation of Arab lands, the implementation of a policy of repression and blockade by the Israeli occupation forces and the establishment of Israeli settlements. Women's organizations would continue to monitor the situation of Syrian women in the occupied Golan Heights with a view to providing them with every possible assistance and guaranteeing the full realization of their human rights, particularly the right to live in peace, and on land free of occupation. Women's advancement was not possible unless the occupation was brought to an end.

20. **Ms. Banzon** (Philippines) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by Malaysia on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and to reaffirm its commitment to the goal of gender equality. The Philippines was striving to mainstream the gender perspective in all areas, as called for in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration. It

therefore welcomed the implementation of an overall strategy with a gender perspective aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals, since all the Goals were inextricably linked to the advancement of women, especially those relating to development and to the eradication of poverty, which was the most pervasive manifestation of the violation of human dignity and human rights.

21. The Philippines' development plan, which included the gender dimension, was already being implemented. The National Commission on the Role of Philippine Women, in collaboration with Government agencies, non-governmental organizations and academia, monitored the implementation of commitments in three key areas: promotion of economic empowerment, protection and fulfilment of women's human rights and promotion of gender-responsive governance.

22. Poverty was still the biggest concern confronting most Filipinos, and it affected rural women in particular. The national programme to eradicate poverty included strategies and policies to address women's development concerns. For example, 98 per cent of the beneficiaries of the Government's microfinance and microcredit efforts were women. As a result of the increased investment in girls' education, and greater parental awareness of the importance of educating girls, the literacy rate among women was 94 per cent, and women continued to outnumber men in terms of school enrolment.

23. Violence against women, which was both a human rights and a development issue, remained an obstacle to advancing the status of women. Trafficking in women and girls had increased, and its operations had become more complex and more difficult to detect and combat. In May 2003 the Philippine Congress had passed the Trafficking in Persons Act, a comprehensive law to eliminate trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which established the institutional mechanisms needed to protect and support victims and set sanctions for traffickers, those who facilitated trafficking and those who bought and engaged the services of trafficked persons for prostitution. An inter-agency council had been set up to monitor the implementation of the Act.

24. Another law enacted during the current year was the Violence against Women and Children Act which protected women and children in the context of all forms of partnership, and provided for the issuance of protection orders. Another notable advance in efforts to combat violence against women was the high degree of awareness among Philippine men about the need to eradicate the problem. Her Government had conducted a forum entitled "Men Speak Out Against Violence Against Women", and had launched a campaign led by Government officials and representatives of civil society. At the international level, the Philippines had ratified, in August 2003, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and had also ratified a number of other international instruments on the situation of women.

25. Women's participation in governance and decision-making was a major determinant of the level of success achieved in the area of gender equality. Women leaders at the local level helped to ensure that gender questions were mainstreamed into Government policy. A national summit had recently been held, and had been attended by 200 women legislators and leaders from around the country, with a view to strategizing on gender mainstreaming, local legislation and women's participation and representation in local governance. Furthermore, bills had been presented to Congress aimed at encouraging women's participation in politics and governance. A women's empowerment bill proposed a minimum 30 per cent representation of women in all decision-making posts of government. Another bill, on gender-balance in political representation and participation, aimed progressively to increase women's participation in elective and appointive positions to 50 per cent by 2012. The latest data showed that women accounted for 36 per cent of total career executive positions in government and that, since the adoption of a new law on women's participation in law enforcement, the percentage of women police officers had been rising year after year.

26. Her Government continued to improve its strategies for mainstreaming the gender perspective in institutional mechanisms, including in budgeting processes, by developing tools and manuals and organizing seminars. Lastly, she noted that much remained to be done in the field of women's rights and gender equality. The actions taken in that regard must not only target women's most pressing concerns, but also reach out to all women, especially those in particularly difficult situations.

27. **Ms. Bowen** (Jamaica) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She stressed the importance of the work of the United Nations in promoting the advancement of women and gender equality, the achievements of near universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the adoption of its Protocol, as well as the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. However, she said that it was clear from an examination of the reports submitted to the Committee on those topics that the international community could not allow complacency to set in but must continue working to lift the legal and social status of women and place them on a path to equality and progress.

28. The arrival in Jamaica recently of a great number of refugees, including women, some of them in advanced stages of pregnancy, was a sharp reminder of the negative impact of armed conflict on women and the importance of a stable democratic society as the essential socio-political framework for achieving the advancement of women. The Caribbean, with the second highest rate of spread of HIV/AIDS in the world, was still grappling with its impact. The imperative for serious international action against the disease could not be overstated, as women and girls suffered most from its effects.

29. Recently the issue of trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and cheap labour had been brought into sharp focus. Jamaica stood ready to support any initiative to eradicate the traffic, which constituted a serious violation of the human rights and dignity of women. It therefore supported the proposal contained in General Assembly resolution 57/176 to declare an international/United Nations year against trafficking in persons, especially women and children, as a means of promoting prevention and eradication. Violence against women, including domestic violence, continued to be widespread and required the application of a zero-tolerance policy at the national level with support from the international community.

30. Jamaica continued to fulfil its obligations under international agreements and conventions to advance the legal and social status of women. It was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and a number of related instruments. Following the conference in Beijing in 1995, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, which answered directly to the Office of the Prime Minister, had been restructured, and its mandate to create opportunities for the full integration of women in the social, economic and cultural development of Jamaica had been reinforced. Another key task of the Bureau was to implement the conventions, protocols and other internationally agreed instruments to promote and protect the interests and advancement of women. Its Chief Executive Officer had recently been elected to serve on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

31. Jamaica recognized the importance of national legislation in the establishment of institutional mechanisms and measures to advance gender equality. In an effort to provide equitable redress to women and girls and to modify discriminatory customs and practices Jamaica was in the process of reviewing 42 pieces of legislation, including the relevant sections of the Constitution. Parliament had recently passed the Property (Right of spouses) Act, soon to enter into effect, which allowed for the equitable division of property between spouses on the breakdown of marriage. In April 1995 the Domestic Violence Act had been passed to provide remedies and protection for victims. Jamaica was pleased with its achievements to date in advancing the welfare of women and reaffirmed its will to establish partnerships with the international community in that area.

32. **Ms. Gjorgjieva** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union. As a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, her country believed that States parties should withdraw the many reservations which were contrary to the substance of the Convention. Although the principle of non-discrimination was widely accepted and incorporated in the legal systems of many countries, in order to overcome inequalities, which were contrary to human rights and democracy, it was not sufficient to recognize the principle of equality in the constitution; measures to promote and achieve de facto equality were also needed, because various forms of gender discrimination persisted. The most efficient means of eliminating gender discrimination was through gender mainstreaming as a strategy for sensitizing and

mobilizing the society. In that context, two areas of particular importance were education and empowerment of women.

33. Her Government attached great importance to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, at both the national and the international levels. The National Action Plan, which identified the activities and strategic measures for improving gender equality, had begun to yield results. As a result of the legal measures introduced obliging all political parties to ensure that each sex had at least 30 per cent representation on the lists of candidates, the percentage of women deputies had increased from 7.5 per cent to 17.5 per cent. There had also been progress in education and health care, and there was a strong civil society network advocating the advancement of women. However, much remained to be done, especially in areas such as employment, empowerment of rural women, economic activity and social participation.

34. The persistence of violence against women, which was no longer considered a private matter but a matter of public concern, required more decisive measures to eradicate. Although statistics indicated that the cases of violence against women were few, the phenomenon should not be underestimated. The activities of many non-governmental organizations, including telephone help lines, shelters and counselling services, revealed that the problem did exist, especially in the more traditional areas.

35. In March 2004 her country had amended its Criminal Code to define the specific offence of domestic violence and set penalties for it. In June 2004 the Family Act was also amended to include provisions requiring the establishment of regional safe houses for victims of domestic violence; the personnel to run them were currently being trained. At present, the only functioning shelter was one organized by civil society.

36. With the aim of pushing for more decisive measures to cope with violence against women, the Minister for Foreign Affairs took part in the meeting organized by her Swiss counterpart in conjunction with the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights. At that meeting a joint declaration on violence against women was adopted. During the period of the general debate at the current session of the General Assembly, the network of Women Foreign Ministers had met to discuss the implementation of the declaration.

37. Combating trafficking in human beings was another priority for her Government. A National Anti-Trafficking Commission had been established, which cooperated closely with non-governmental organizations and international organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Government had also set up a national anti-trafficking programme and a special working group charged with developing a national action plan focused on prevention, prosecution and protection. The National Commission also had a special task force to deal with trafficking in children, an issue also addressed by the national action plan for children currently being drafted. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had also signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols and had begun the process of ratification.

38. **Ms. Davtyan** (Armenia) said that the accession of her Government to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993 firmly placed gender issues on the national agenda. The periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women gave Armenia the opportunity to systematically review its achievements, identify the challenges and define policies to overcome obstacles.

39. The review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women should focus on the implementation of the Platform, with the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, and a renewal of the commitment to fully implement the agreed goals. Gender equality and the empowerment of women were not only goals in themselves but prerequisites for sustainable development. It was therefore important to ensure that a gender dimension was incorporated as a cross-cutting issue into the overall review of the Millennium Development Goals in 2005. In that regard, her delegation stressed the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all United Nations policies and programmes, and hoped that the conclusions reached in the course of the review and appraisal of the Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming would give further impetus to the process.

40. In Armenia, work was under way to improve the situation of women and promote gender equality.

Earlier in 2004, her Government had adopted a national action plan on improving the status of women and enhancing their role in society for the period 2004-2010, which addressed existing problems in a number of critical areas, such as women's participation in decision-making and violence against women. In 2004, a woman had been appointed as the first Ombudsman in Armenia, and the newly created post of Adviser to the Prime Minister on Women's Issues had also been filled by a woman. Gender issues were among the priorities of Armenia's cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In February 2004, a joint project for Georgia and Armenia, had been undertaken with UNDP on gender and politics in the South Caucasus, 2004-2006, the aim of which was to identify local and regional gender problems, develop a programme of regional activities and improve the regional gender promotion strategy.

41. A major area of concern for her Government was violence against women and, in particular, one of its most serious forms, trafficking in women. Thus, it welcomed the establishment by the Commission on Human Rights of the post of Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Unfortunately, the countries in her region were increasingly becoming countries of origin and of transit for trafficking. In order to combat that scourge, Armenia had in 2004 adopted a national action plan for prevention of trafficking in persons for the period 2004-2006, which envisaged short- and long-term legislative reform measures, public awareness-raising, and victim protection and reintegration. In March 2004, the Government and UNDP had launched an anti-trafficking programme offering capacity-building support and victim assistance, providing important backing for the national efforts against trafficking. Domestic abuse was another form of violence against women, which took place in the private sphere and was largely underreported. The information collected by non-governmental organizations through alternative monitoring mechanisms such as hotlines and counselling services was a valuable addition to the official data.

42. **Mr. K. C.** (Nepal), endorsing the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said his delegation believed that the key to promoting women's rights lay in their economic, social and political empowerment. Even though the adoption of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action had, together with other national and international measures, helped improve the condition of women around the world, many were still enduring poverty, illiteracy, disease, discrimination and violence. Sustained investment was critical in giving women better access to education, primary health care, reproductive health care, drinking water and sanitation, and the economic resources they needed to stand on their own feet. The lack of financial resources had been the main cause of the failure to achieve an adequate level of general development.

43. His Government's policy on gender issues was based on mainstreaming a gender perspective in government work, awareness-raising, greater participation by women in policy-making and expedited legislative reforms ensuring equality, and it was in that framework that the Government had approved its action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In January 2004, Nepal had actively participated in the discussion of its combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee's concluding comments had been widely disseminated and the Government had begun to take the necessary action to incorporate the Committee's recommendations into national policies. Nepal supported the Committee's request for a one-week extension of its sessions so that it could give due consideration to national reports.

44. Trafficking in women and children was a modern form of slavery that had to be fought collectively, and therefore Nepal called on the international community to protect the human rights of the victims of trafficking by providing them with temporary shelter and humane treatment and facilitating their return to their countries. Nepal's Human Rights Commission had appointed a rapporteur on trafficking to coordinate the Government's own activities.

45. Violence against women, particularly sexual violence and the violence women faced in conflict situations, was another problem that merited serious action by Member States. Nepal appealed to the developed countries to contribute generously to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

46. The commitments made under the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the Millennium Development Goals needed to be translated into action through greater international cooperation and sustained investment in the sectors that would advance the empowerment of women and gender equality. Poverty eradication must be the cornerstone of the effort to remove the obstacles impeding the emancipation and advancement of women. In the case of Nepal, the insurgency by so-called Maoists had seriously affected the well-being of the people. His Government was determined to achieve a negotiated settlement and at the same time to protect the life and property of its people, particularly the women and children. It was also striving to provide means of livelihood and protection to affected women, to keep them from falling victim to trafficking and sexual exploitation. Nepal therefore appealed to the international community, and especially the United Nations system, to give more support to its efforts to safeguard the welfare and rights of those vulnerable women.

47. **Ms. Khalil** (Egypt), endorsing the statement made by Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, observed that in Egypt an important step in the advancement of women and the consolidation of their rights had been to reform the Family Act so that divorce proceedings had been made easier for women. The Citizenship Act had also been amended so that Egyptian women married to foreigners had the same rights as did men to transmit Egyptian citizenship to their children. Equality between women and men was a principle recognized in Egypt's Constitution and respected by its institutions. For instance, all government ministries had established equal opportunity units to guarantee that no woman was denied the right to work. New family courts had also been set up in order to simplify court proceedings and make them more accessible to women. The National Women's Council had set up the Office of the Women's Affairs Ombudsman, which was responsible for reviewing complaints submitted by women and providing them with legal assistance.

48. Concerned by the problem of domestic violence, her Government planned to establish mechanisms to determine the causes and the actual proportions of the problem in the country, because it currently did not have adequate statistics to serve as a basis for action in that regard. The Ministry of the Interior had worked with the Office of the Women's Affairs Ombudsman to train police officers in registering domestic violence complaints by women, and had decided to include more women in the police force to investigate such cases. The legislation governing the crime of rape had also been improved by the elimination of the provision that used to allow a man convicted of rape to escape punishment if he married the victim. The Government was in the process of updating all laws relating to the various forms of violence against women: they were being assessed with a view to modernizing or amending them to reflect the modern-day situation, in order to guarantee Egyptian women all their rights.

49. Egypt reaffirmed the need to take gender issues into account in economic policies and in the battle against poverty, an obstacle to development that hit women especially hard. It was crucial to put into effect policies and programmes favouring gender equality as a way of consolidating economic and social development, which in turn would have a positive impact on the situation of women.

50. **Ms. Rivero** (Uruguay) welcomed the reports submitted by the Secretariat, in particular the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/59/214, and expressed her satisfaction at the progress made by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), through the efforts of its Director and her team.

51. With regard to developments in Uruguay, she acknowledged that structural weaknesses remained in the institutional treatment of gender issues. However, since the establishment of the Group of Women Parliamentarians and the Special Commission for Gender and Equity in the Chamber of Deputies, the increasingly dynamic dialogue between the various State actors and civil society and regional and international cooperation had led to a gradual improvement in the situation of women. Of particular significance was the Plan for Equal Opportunities and Rights, which had been developed in Montevideo at the departmental level and was to be extended to cover the rest of the country. The Equal Employment Plan, adopted within the framework of a tripartite national commission on equal opportunities, had also yielded positive results. Furthermore, in the context of the national administration of public education, efforts had

been made to promote universal primary education from the age of four years.

52. Following the adoption of Acts No. 16.797 of 1995 and No. 17.514 of 2002 concerning the offence of domestic violence, considerable progress had been made in Uruguay in the area of women's rights. Uruguay had also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and through ongoing support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), projects of crucial importance to the country had been carried out.

53. **Ms. Filip** (Inter-Parliamentary Union) said that, in working to enhance and strengthen democracy, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) placed particular emphasis on the question of gender equality in politics and on the membership of parliaments, given that a balanced participation of women and men in the management of public affairs was central to any democracy. Parliaments had the vital task of considering issues of concern to society and promoting social change, particularly with regard to the advancement of women. They were therefore uniquely placed to shape and amend the legal framework underlying and determining women's rights in all areas and also to fuel public debate and inform public opinion and the media, which influenced them in turn. For those reasons, IPU was making every effort to ensure parliamentary awareness of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action.

54. In preparation for the review and evaluation of the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women to be undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, the 111th IPU Assembly, which had taken place in September 2004 in Geneva, had conducted an overall evaluation of the issue from a parliamentary perspective and had adopted a resolution reaffirming its commitment to the objectives set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and stressing that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was an essential prerequisite for meeting all the Millennium Development Goals. The resolution had also underlined the fact that, 10 years after Beijing, effective gender equality was still far from being a reality and had recommended a series of measures to promote the advancement of women in the political, economic and social fields with a specific focus on human security, conflict resolution and the girl child. In that connection, it was clear that strong parliaments and sustained parliamentary action were needed to ensure respect for women's rights. To that end, two issues must be addressed: the very low presence of women in parliamentary assemblies and the enhancement of parliaments' capacities to address gender issues.

55. The latest statistics from IPU showed that women accounted for 15.4 per cent of parliamentarians in both lower and upper houses. The previous decade had shown a continuous increase in women's participation and the figures for 2004 were the highest to date. The National Assembly of Rwanda, for instance, had almost achieved full gender equality. However, in spite of those positive signs, only 15 countries had reached the 30 per cent threshold of women parliamentarians, regarded as the minimum necessary for women to have a significant impact on the work of the parliament. Furthermore, in 69 countries women accounted for only 10 per cent or less of parliamentarians, and a number of countries still denied women the right to vote and to stand for election. IPU was working to improve that situation through awareness-raising campaigns, technical assistance programmes, such as those it had carried out in Rwanda, Burundi, Djibouti and Timor-Leste, and the publication and dissemination of research. Recognizing the fundamental role and utility of quotas and other affirmative action measures in promoting women's participation in parliament, IPU had amended its Rules so as to make it compulsory subject to sanctions, to include women in delegations to its assemblies. As a result of that practice which she submitted for consideration by the Committee almost 30 per cent of the participants at the most recent meeting in Geneva had been women.

56. With regard to the capacity of parliaments to address gender issues, the IPU resolution had made strong recommendations, such as the establishment of parliamentary committees on gender equality, the creation of a supportive environment for women in parliament with gender-sensitive standing orders, codes of conduct and rules and the development of family-friendly working hours. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all governmental policies, facilitating access to sex-disaggregated information and adopting measures to raise men's awareness of gender issues had also been recommended.

57. IPU hoped that the parliamentary event on gender equality in politics, organized jointly by IPU and the Division for the Advancement of Women and due to take place during the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, would help to strengthen the promotion and respect of women's rights. It stood ready to continue cooperating with the United Nations in that field.

58. **Ms. Gendre** (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that, as an organization mandated to protect and assist victims of armed conflict, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had long been concerned with the needs of women who, rather than being passive victims in conflicts, were often responsible for holding families and communities together in the face of adversity.

59. In recognition of the multiple roles played by women in armed conflict, ICRC had pledged in 1999 to promote respect for women and girls, with a particular focus on sexual violence, and appropriately to assess their needs. As a first step, it had carried out an in-depth study of the needs of women affected by armed conflict and the adequacy of international law to respond to those needs. As a follow-up, it had produced and widely distributed a manual for working with women, the priority now being to ensure that its conclusions were effectively integrated into field operations. ICRC's approach was to analyse the specific needs of women and integrate them into operational planning and strategies, and to develop specific programmes in response to those needs.

60. In its prevention activities, ICRC endeavoured to integrate the needs of women and the prohibition of sexual violence — one of the most serious violations of international humanitarian law — into its dissemination sessions to armed forces and armed opposition groups. Communication campaigns aimed at preventing violations against women had also been developed using images and language that were culturally appropriate for the target audience. Sexual violence was one of the most frequent and traumatic violations that women suffered in wartime, as well as one of the most difficult issues for humanitarian organizations to address, owing to the need to avoid stigmatizing women as "rape victims" in the eyes of their family or community. Moreover, humanitarian workers were confronted with so many competing priorities in war zones that sexual violence sometimes became "invisible".

61. As part of its protection activities for women deprived of their freedom in the context of armed conflict or internal disturbance, ICRC worked to ensure that detention conditions met the requirements of international humanitarian law, including separate accommodation from men of female guards and monitoring of any possible discrimination.

62. In terms of assistance, ICRC conducted programmes aimed at responding to the immediate needs of women and their families, and others which sought to improve, in a more sustainable way, their economic situation in order to help them preserve their autonomy and dignity. Often programmes also served as a means of recreating the social links destroyed by conflict.

63. Constant efforts must be made to promote knowledge of the plight of women affected by armed conflict, improve compliance with the obligations of international humanitarian law and ensure that humanitarian programmes and activities took into account the needs and perspectives of women.

64. **Mr. Israeli** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that certain delegations from countries whose record on their own treatment of women was hardly sterling would have the committee believe that his country sought to make Palestinian women suffer. Nothing could be further from the truth. His Government was doing all it could to improve the situation of Palestinian women, from supplying them with humanitarian aid and medical attention to educating and training them so that they could be productive and independent members of the world community. His country strove to protect Palestinian women's civil and human rights as much as possible, while still protecting its own population. The Palestinian leadership should end incitement of terror, as demanded by its commitments under international law and the road map. In so doing, both parties could return to the peace process and Palestinian women could regain the quality of life they had had prior to the previous four years of Palestinian terror.

65. As for the accusation that Israel was occupying parts of southern Lebanon, he drew the Committee's attention to Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), stating clearly that the only foreign military force on Lebanese soil was the one maintained by Syria.

66. **Ms. Hannan** (Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women) thanked all delegations for

their contributions and, in particular, their support for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She reiterated the importance of celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention at the national level as a way of raising awareness among society. She drew the Committee's attention to the statement made in that regard by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

67. She also welcomed the interest shown in the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, to be conducted in 2005. She had noted that Member States attached great importance to the link between the Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals and were in favour of revitalizing the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and that they had stressed the need to adopt more concrete measures to integrate the gender perspective into both the United Nations system and States themselves.

68. She had also taken note of other issues raised by delegations: the gender perspective in the context of peace and security, the poor representation of women in decision-making positions, poverty-analysis from a gender perspective, in particular in the context of the upcoming review and appraisal of the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, and the situation of women within the United Nations system. She assured the Committee that all the issues mentioned would be incorporated into the review and appraisal process.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.